Cumbria Office of Police and Crime Commissioner

**Cumbria Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) response to inspections of Cumbria Constabulary published by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)**

*Section 33 of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 37 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017) requires local policing bodies to respond to recommendations in inspectors reports within 56 days.*

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| **Inspection Title:** | Review of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic – 2021 |
| **Date Published:** | 23/06/2021 |
| **Type of Inspection:** | National Inspection |
| **Key Findings** | |
| The United Kingdom entered the first national lockdown on 23 March 2020. Most of us were instructed to stay at home. This meant many victims of domestic abuse couldn’t distance themselves from their abuser, safely contact the police for help or get support from family and friends. Forces started to work differently, recognising that the absence of a call to the police doesn’t imply absence of abuse and harm. Many forces adopted innovative new practices to check on the safety of victims of domestic abuse, finding new ways to ‘reach in’ to them rather than waiting for victims to ‘reach out’ | |
| **Recommendations:** | |
| 1. #19165 / Recommendation 1  * We recommend that if forces continue to adopt online contact methods in respect of victims of domestic abuse, they should immediately introduce an effective supervision and monitoring framework. The framework should assess the suitability of such contact methods, ensuring that victim needs are at the forefront of decisions around their use and appropriate onward action is taken in all cases. * We recommend that forces immediately review their use of a telephone-based initial response to any domestic abuse incidents and crimes and ensure that it is in accordance with the strict parameters set out by the College of Policing.  1. #19208 / Recommendation 2 – We recommend that forces immediately review their capacity to provide ongoing support and safeguarding to victims of domestic abuse whose case is awaiting trial at court. This should:  * Ensure there are sufficient resources available to maintain contact with victims to keep them up to date with the progress of their case; and * Enable the offer of access to specialist support services as well as opportunities to address concerns victims may have regarding continuing to support a prosecution through the delays.  1. #19251 / Recommendation 3 – We recommend that all forces immediately review their use of outcome 15, outcome 16 and evidence led prosecutions. This is to ensure that:  * Domestic abuse investigations guarantee all attempts to engage victims are explored, and that all possible lines of evidence are considered so that in all cases the best possible outcomes for victims are achieved. * There is regular and effective supervision of investigations that supports the above point to be achieved; and * The use of outcomes 15 and 16 is appropriate, and the reasons for using them, including auditable evidence of victim engagement, are clearly recorded. | |
| **PCC & Chief Constable Response to Report and Recommendation:** | |
| The Police & Crime Commissioner welcomes the Review of Policing Domestic Abuse During the Pandemic - 2021.  “Victims of domestic abuse need to know that help is out there. We continue to work with the force to ensure that their response to domestic abuse remains a priority. Concerns around domestic abuse have been heightened due to the pandemic. We will continue to work with the Chief Constable and hold her to account for the force’s response to Domestic Abuse.  We will:  Continue to work with the force to feedback DA survivors’ experiences of reporting (or barriers to it) and of the CJS;  Continue to work with the police to develop initiatives to address emerging issues around Domestic Abuse  Our current Police and Crime Plan objective around the focus on victims includes domestic abuse as a priority.  We will continue to work with partner agencies to continue to commission and develop specialist services to support victims of domestic abuse, including Independent Domestic Violence Advisors. Within the last year, this has included the establishment of a support service of children and young people who have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse, as well as further development of specialist programmes to change the behaviour of perpetrators of abuse to include those posing a high risk of harm to victims.  My office has also continued to work with the county’s women centres to provide broader support for women to reduce vulnerability and to offer another avenue for them to gain the confidence to seek help with domestic abuse. Within all of this service development, we encourage the police and support agencies to work together to improve survivors’ experiences of accessing and using services and are pleased to see the strong partnership working that is taking place.  The force has now introduced a new online service where victims of crime can “live chat” online to a call handler, alongside our other online access services and telephone contact services.  The force guarantees all attempts to engage victims of Domestic Abuse investigations are explored and that all possible lines of evidence are considered so that in all cases the best possible outcomes for victims are achieved. This is completed on a continual basis by the Constabulary and reported via the Strategic Performance Board chaired by the DCC. | |